



Fort Macon

A guide and brief history of

Information

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10,000 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$1,922.54 or .19 cents per copy.
10M 8/08

Need for Coastal Defense

The danger of naval attack along the North Carolina coast seems remote now but during the 18th and 19th centuries the region around Beaufort was extremely vulnerable to attack. Blackbeard and other pirates passed through Beaufort Inlet at will and successive wars with Spain, France and Great Britain during the Colonial Period provided a constant threat of coastal raids by enemy warships. Indeed, Beaufort was captured and plundered by the Spanish in 1747 and again by the British in 1782.

North Carolina leaders recognized the need for coastal defenses to prevent future attacks and began efforts to construct forts. The eastern point of Bogue Banks was determined to be the best location from which a fort might guard the entrance to Beaufort Inlet. In 1756, construction began there on a small fascine fort known as Fort Dobbs. Fort Dobbs was never finished and the inlet remained undefended during the American Revolution.

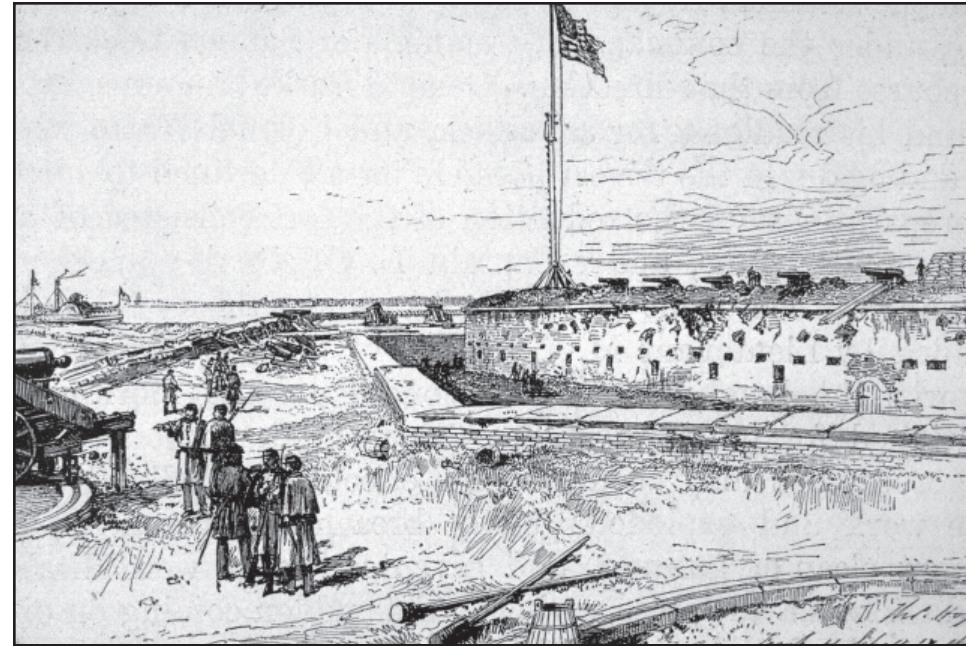
Early in the 1800s, continued strained relations with Great Britain caused the United States government to build a national defense chain of coastal forts for protection. As a part of this defense, a small masonry fort named Fort Hampton, after a North Carolina Revolutionary War hero, was built to guard Beaufort Inlet during 1808-09. This fort guarded the inlet during the subsequent War of 1812 but was abandoned shortly after the end of the war. Shore erosion and a hurricane in 1825 were responsible for sweeping Fort Hampton into Beaufort Inlet by 1826.

The War of 1812 demonstrated the weakness of existing coastal defenses and prompted the United States government into beginning construction on an improved chain of coastal fortifications for national defense. This ambitious undertaking involved the construction of 38 new, permanent coastal forts known as the Third System. The forts were built between 1817 and 1865. Fort Macon was a part of this system. Fort Macon guarded Beaufort Inlet and Beaufort Harbor, North Carolina's only major deep-water ocean port.

Fort Macon was designed by Brig. Gen. Simon Bernard and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was named after North



Surrender of Fort Macon, April 26, 1862. From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 24, 1862.



Fort Macon the day after its surrender, showing the damage done to its walls by Union artillery fire. From Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.

Carolina's eminent statesman of the period, Nathaniel Macon. Construction began in 1826 and lasted for eight years. The fort was completed in December, 1834 and was improved with further modifications during 1841-46. The total cost of the fort was \$463,790. As a result of congressional economizing, the fort was actively garrisoned only from 1834-36, 1842-44 and 1848-49. Often, an ordnance sergeant acting as a caretaker was the only person stationed by the Army at the fort.

War Between the States

The War Between the States began on April 12, 1861 and only two days elapsed before local North Carolina militia forces from Beaufort arrived to seize the fort for the state of North Carolina and the Confederacy. North Carolina Confederate forces occupied the fort for a year, preparing it for battle and arming it with 54 heavy cannons.

Early in 1862, Union forces commanded by Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside swept through eastern North Carolina and part of Burnside's command under Brig. Gen. John G. Parke was sent to capture Fort Macon. Parke's men captured Morehead City and Beaufort without resistance, then landed on Bogue Banks during March and April to operate against Fort Macon.

Col. Moses J. White and 400 North Carolina Confederates in the fort refused to surrender even though the fort was hopelessly surrounded. On April 25, 1862, Parke's Union forces bombarded the fort with heavy siege guns for 11 hours, aided by the fire of four Union navy gunboats in the ocean offshore and by floating batteries in the sound to the east. While the fort easily repulsed the Union gunboat attack, the Union land batteries, utilizing new rifled

cannons, hit the fort 560 times. There was such extensive damage that Col. White was forced to surrender the following morning, April 26. The fort's Confederate garrison was then paroled as prisoners of war. This battle was the second time in history new rifled cannons had been used against a fort and demonstrated the obsolescence of fortifications such as Fort Macon as a way of defense.

The Union army held Fort Macon for the remainder of the war while Beaufort Harbor served as an important coaling and repair station for the Union navy.

During the Reconstruction Era, the U.S. Army actively occupied Fort Macon until 1877. For about 11 years during this era, since there were no state or federal penitentiaries in the military district of North and South Carolina, Fort Macon was used as a civil and military prison, until 1876.

The Second State Park

Fort Macon was deactivated after 1877 only to be regarrisoned by state troops once again during the summer of 1898 for the Spanish-American War. Finally, in 1903, the U.S. Army completely abandoned the fort. The fort was not even used during World War I, and in 1923 it was offered for sale as surplus military property. However, at the bidding of North Carolina leaders, a Congressional Act on June 4, 1924, gave the fort and surrounding reservation to the state of North Carolina to be used as a public park. Fort Macon and the surrounding property was the second area acquired by the state for the purpose of establishing a state parks system.

During 1934-35, the Civilian Conservation Corps restored the fort and established public recreational facilities, which enabled Fort Macon State Park to officially open May 1, 1936, as North Carolina's first functioning state park.

At the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Army leased the park from the state and actively manned the fort with Coast Artillery troops once again to protect a number of important nearby facilities. The fort was occupied from December, 1941, to November, 1944. On October 1, 1946, the Army returned the fort and the park to the state.

Today, Fort Macon is one of North Carolina's most visited state parks, receiving more than one million visitors each year.

For detailed information about the history of Fort Macon, visit the Friends of Fort Macon Web site at www.clis.com/friends.